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SEMITIC STUDY IN THE UNIVERSITY.¹

The term "Semitic study" as ordinarily understood is apt to be taken in a narrow sense; while, as understood by specialists, it is a term almost incapable of limitation. Let us use it, neither in its very narrow, nor in its very broad sense; as including, on the one hand, the study of the grammar and lexicography both of individual languages and of the family; but on the other hand, the study of the literature of these different peoples and their history: the study of the growth and mutual relations of Semitic speech, but at the same time a study of the growth and mutual relations of Semitic thought, of Semitic civilizations. The field is too broad perhaps for one man to cover even superficially; and yet it is all one field; it is possible, of course, to divide into many divisions, still it forms in itself one great division.

The term "University" as ordinarily employed is even more indefinite than that of "Semitic study." There is in our country no standard by which to define it. It may be an institution with thousands of students, or with only tens; with a dozen great departments, or made up exclusively of a preparatory school. Here again, we must have an understanding. Perhaps it may be taken to include under-graduate work, and post-graduate work, the former that of the Junior and Senior academic years, the latter, work of a non-professional character. And now upon the topic of Semitic study in the University, we may take up very hurriedly two questions: (1) What has been done? (2) What can be done?

(1) *What has been done?*

(a) In years *long gone by*, Semitic study, or speaking more accurately, Hebrew study, constituted a part of the required college curriculum. We read with much relish of the great feats performed in those days. The severity of the labor, in many cases, and zeal with which it was pursued, alike interest and stimulate us. In those times when only ministers received an education, it was natural and proper that this subject should receive a large share of attention; and besides, there was less to be studied then than now. Science was almost unknown; modern languages altogether ignored. Latin, Greek and Hebrew reigned supreme. It is to be noted, however, that the Semitic study of this age was theological, not philological; that it was almost exclusively Hebrew study, and that too, unscientific.

(b) But when others than ministers began to study; when new subjects began to be introduced, there came a change. Hebrew study, meagre and unsatisfactory as it had been, dropped out. In a few institutions here and there, in all not ten, a pitifully small amount of work was being done, under the guidance of an instructor who, in most cases, knew only enough to keep ahead of his class. It is true that during this second period there were in several institutions lectures or recitations upon the Old Testament History and Literature. This, according to our definition, was Semitic study; but the work even when carried on was practically a *farce*, unattended unless compulsory; and when attended, valueless. From these two periods, however, we may pass to a *third*, to which we may assign the past ten or twelve years; and here a different condition of things con-

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fronts us :—Partly on account of the interest attaching to the revision of the Old Testament, partly on account of the strange and startling disclosures of German critics, partly also because of the wonderful value, from every point of view, of the treasures hidden in ancient ruins so recently brought to light, and still more recently beginning to be understood,—for all these reasons, and perhaps others, Semitic study in the University, as well as elsewhere, has been born again, born to a life far more vigorous than the old life, because more widely extended, more deeply rooted; and what do we see (I refer now *only* to our Universities)?

1) Classes for Hebrew study, larger and smaller, for academic students, in *all* the leading, and in a majority of the smaller institutions.

2) Classes in Hebrew for post-graduates.

3) Classes in Assyrian, consisting of ten, twenty, and even twenty-five,—larger than any found in German Universities.

4) Under-graduate and post-graduate classes in Arabic, Aramaic, Syriac and even Ethiopic.

5) Courses of lectures on Semitic topics, attended by scores and even hundreds.

6) Under-graduate classes in many colleges studying Semitic literatures, as they would study Roman and Greek literature.

7) Classes and bands of men, outside of college work, carrying on systematic and scientific courses of Semitic study.

We find the under-graduates engaged not only in study of Hebrew, but also in that of Assyrian and Arabic. Post-graduates, by scores, the whole or greater part of whose time is given to Semitic studies. University men of all classes and departments engaged in work which comes properly under the head of “Semitic study.”

(2) *What can be done?*

What has been done *can* be done, and more. Here I may be compelled to repeat, in a measure, what has already been said; for in so far as “What has been done” continues to be “What can be done,” I have anticipated the present point.

To be sure the same work cannot be done in every institution, but after all there must be a general sameness.

1) *Hebrew*, at all events, can be taught. With a fair class the elements of the language should be mastered in a course of two hours a week running through a year, or four hours a week during half a year. The maturity and experience of the students who take up the subject, enable them to accomplish much more than would otherwise be possible. But there may also be a second course for members of the Senior Class, who perhaps have taken the first course during their Junior year. Here a host of subjects present themselves, selected chapters illustrating the literature of a special period; the exhaustive study of a single writer, or the consideration of a special topic. Meanwhile the grammar may be reviewed, the principles grasped more firmly, the vocabulary increased, the details of syntax examined. And such courses will be adapted to the wants of post-graduates as well as under-graduates.

2) *Assyrian* may be taken up; not with profit by all; but certainly to the advantage of those who have special aptitude for language and particular interest in Hebrew. In a two hours' course extending through but a single year, should no

more time be found for it, the important phonograms and ideograms (say 300) can be learned, the principles of the grammar obtained, the vocabulary mastered and compared with that of the sister languages, the syllabaries analyzed, and some of the more interesting historical texts interpreted from the cuneiform. Experience has shown that Assyrian is far easier to grasp than Arabic. To be sure, what was impossible ten years ago has now been rendered possible by reason of the investigations which have been made during this period and which have been published. In a second course, more difficult material may be taken up, and even original work on the part of the student encouraged.

3) *Arabic* should not be forgotten in the overwhelming interest now centering in Assyriology. Here again under-graduates as well as post-graduates may be urged to take hold, and though little comparatively can be accomplished in this or any other subject in so short a time, a beginning can be made, and an interest can be aroused which, with proper guidance, will lead in later years to much that may prove valuable.

4) I shall not speak of Syriac, Aramaic, or Ethiopic, in one or more of which something may also be done; but special emphasis may be laid upon courses of lectures more or less technical covering Semitic literature, Semitic history, the growth and development of Semitic religious thought, Semitic civilization, and kindred topics. It is without doubt true, as has been shown by actual experiment, that many men, in all our institutions, engaged specially perhaps in another department, desire to have at least a general knowledge of the latest facts and theories in the Semitic department. There is no subject more attractive to the mind of a thoughtful man, whatever be his specialty, than that of Semitic archæology.

5) I have not mentioned philology as such, although this too furnishes an important field for university work. There is, then, much that can be done. Here, as everywhere, all things, speaking broadly, are possible, provided only that there be energy and enthusiasm. It is true that not all even of the better institutions, and here belong our state universities, have as yet made provision for Semitic work upon the scale here indicated. Too much must not be expected at once. Ten years have done much; the next ten will do more. There should be no flagging of the interest which has already arisen. It must not even be allowed to stand still. It must be more vigorously cultivated in the future than in the past, for three reasons:

1) Because of the long season of past neglect, to atone for which, and to compensate for which, a mighty effort will be necessary.

2) Because of the present necessity of the case, a necessity born of the peculiar and, may I add, providential circumstances of the present quarter-century, marked as it is by discoveries of so vital a character.

3) Because of the essential importance of the study itself, an importance now appreciated not only by those who make this study their profession, but as well by intelligent, broad-minded and broad-hearted men in every line of labor.